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ABSTRACT

The value of markedness theory in constructing explanatory models of linguistic meaning is questioned, particularly the claim that a single relationship (marked vs. unmarked) accounts for all differences in asymmetrically paired terms. It is argued that because unmarked terms vary greatly in the distributions that identify them as unmarked, patterns of unmarked distribution should be considered on a case-by-case basis to gain insights into the causes of the distinctions between marked and unmarked. With reference to the gradable predicate, it is shown that markedness and unmarkedness follow from facts about the reference and use of these terms. It is proposed that a coherent discussion of asymmetrical distribution patterns will not be possible until the misunderstood categories, "marked and unmarked," are abandoned and better means of explanation are defined. Contains 14 references. (MSE)

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A NOTE ON PRAGMATIC MARKEDNESS

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ABSTRACT

Since the concept of markedness (asymmetrical pairing in language) was first developed in the Prague school, it has been taken to heart by linguists, semioticians, and psychologists alike, who often use markedness relations to explain various asymmetries within languages. But what explains markedness? The literature on gradable predicates provides many hypotheses, most of which assume that a single generalization can explain the wider distribution of all unmarked predicates and/or the limited distribution of all marked predicates (for instance, that all unmarked terms have positive polarity or that unmarked terms are psychologically simpler). But such a scenario seems unlikely, since unmarked terms vary greatly in the distributions that identify them as 'unmarked' as do marked terms. This paper argues that patterns of unmarked distribution should be considered on a case-by-case basis in order to gain insights into the causes of the distinctions between the marked and the unmarked. It is shown, with reference to gradable predicate, that markedness and unmarkedness follow from facts about the reference and use of these terms.

The aim of this paper is to question the value of markedness theory in constructing explanatory models of linguistic meaning. This goal grew out of my frustration in reading repeatedly in the literature on gradable adjectives that certain differences in the distributions of members of an antonym pair can be "explained" in terms of markedness, which is represented in these treatments as a lexical feature or a semantic primitive (e.g., in Rusiecki, 1985; Lehrer, 1985), while other authors give unconstrained or unmotivated explanations of markedness, many of them claiming that unmarked concepts are 'psychologically less complex' than marked ones (e.g., Bartsch and Vennemann, 1972; Lakoff, 1987). This paper questions the claim that the pairs of terms in sentences (1)-(3) are in a single type of relation ('marked'/'unmarked') that accounts for all of the differences between the (a) terms and the (b) terms, including differences in use in measure phrases, nominalization, and implications for *how* questions, as shown in these examples.

(1) a. How **tall** are you? (no implication that you are tall)
b. *How **shórt** are you? (not statable with sentential stress on *short*)

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(2) a. How **good** is that paper? (no implication that the paper is good)
b. How **bad** is that paper? (implication that the paper is bad to some degree)

(3) a. How **warm** is the soup? (implication that the soup is warm)
b. How **cool** is the soup? (implication that the soup is cool)

As indicated by the title, this paper argues that the phenomena that form the basis of the argument for a marked/unmarked distinction are predictable from the meanings of the words, extralinguistic knowledge, and pragmatic principles. Thus, the terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' are not useful to an explanatory theory of gradable adjective meaning.

Markedness theory concerns the proliferation of binary distinctions in natural language and is intended to account for the asymmetries in these binary distinctions. The terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' originated in the structuralist phonology of Trubetzkoy (1939). Although the use of the terms today differs quite a bit from Trubetzkoy's original intention, we can see the legacy of the Prague Circle in modern phonology, where binary feature systems and underspecification theories depend upon asymmetrical distribution of features or phonemes.

The concept of markedness was later extended to semantics by Roman Jakobson (Battistella, 1990, p. 16). In the original estimation of markedness, marked/unmarked relations were context-dependent, language-specific, and potentially arbitrary. In more recent work, linguists have updated the concepts of marked and unmarked in order to conform to generative theories of linguistics, whose background assumptions and goals differ in a number of ways from those of the structuralist theories. However, what was interesting in structuralist theories is not necessarily explanatory. It is the latter qualification that is required in modern linguistics.

Two important facts to keep in mind about markedness are: (a) that markedness relations are necessarily binary relations, and (b) that these relations are completely relative. For example, we cannot say simply that *tall* is an unmarked term; instead we must say that it is unmarked with respect to *short*, which is its marked counterpart. Thus, a linguistic item might be marked with respect to a certain other item, but unmarked with respect to yet another. Croft (1992) provides a nice example of this in the Chumash verbal agreement system, shown in (4), for which it is claimed that the plural is marked relative to the singular, but unmarked relative to the dual, as judged by morphological complexity.

(4) Chumash verbal agreement system (Croft, 1992, from Koeber 1904, p. 33):

		singular	plural	dual
1st person	k-	k-i-		k-i-s-
2nd person	p-	p-i-		p-i-s-
3rd person	s-	s-i-		s-i-s-

The criteria for determining which member of a pair is marked and which unmarked vary among authors and linguistic phenomena. For instance, when sorting gradable adjectives in terms of markedness, Hamilton and Deese (1971) use two criteria, listed in (5).

(5) Hamilton and Deese criteria for unmarked terms (context neutralization):
   a. basic root form of the unmarked member is also the name of the dimension (e.g., *wide/width* vs. *narrow/*narrowth*)
   b. term can be used impartially in *how* questions (e.g., (1a) and (2a) above)

However, Battistella (1990) notes that markedness cannot be determined by such absolute criteria as those in Hamilton and Deese (1971), or similar short lists used by other linguists and psychologists. Instead, the spirit of relativity in the markedness theory would hold that whichever member of a pair displays the most unmarked characteristics is the unmarked member. Not every unmarked item, then, has the same sets of these properties. Thus, the items listed in (6) that fulfill some of the unmarkedness criteria with respect to their antonyms are just as much unmarked items as those which fulfill more than one criterion.

(6) Items that fulfill both (7a and b): *true(false)*, *good(bad)*, *high(low)*, *long(short)*, etc.
Items that fulfill only (7a): *warm(cool)*
Items that fulfill only (7b): *big(little)*, *hard(easy)*, *old(young)*, etc.
Items that fulfill neither: *first/last*, *solid/hollow*, *left/right*, *tiny/huge*, etc.

Battistella's more complete, and necessarily more vague, list of criteria for all types of markedness relations is listed in (7). This list reflects his summary of markedness theory as developed by scholars from Trubetzkoy onward.

(7) **Criteria for Linguistic (Un)Markedness** (Battistella, 1990)

I. Distributional Criteria
   a. Neutralization
      • marked term is excluded from the context (cf (1b,c) and (2b,c))
   b. Optimality
      • if a language has X (marked), then it necessarily has Y (unmarked)
      (e.g., every language that has /ü/ has /i/, /i/ = unmarked with respect to /ü/)

II. Amount of Structure Criteria
   a. Indeterminateness
      • unmarked term has less specific meaning, may stand for both poles of the opposition
      (e.g., *tall* can be used in referring to both tall and short things in contexts like (1b,c))
   b. Simplicity
      • unmarked elements are less elaborate in form (e.g., *host* vs. *hostess*)
   c. Syncretization
      • unmarked may be differentiated into more subcategories
      (e.g., present tense often has more conjugational forms than past)

III. Prototypicality
      • unmarked form is "best example" of the category

Neutralization is often considered the most general criterion for markedness. Lehrer (1985) lists the most common ways in which neutralization occurs in antonymous adjectives,

and her list is presented here in (8). As in the simpler list given by Hamilton and Deese (1971), the variety neutralization contexts represents a variety of different ways in which an unmarked member of a pair can fulfill the unmarkedness criteria. No single unmarked member of a pair must occur in all of these neutralized contexts, though some do.

(8) **Markedness properties of antonym pairs** (Lehrer, 1985)

I. Neutralization of an opposition in questions by **unmarked** member (*How tall/*short are you?*)

II. Neutralization of an opposition in nominalizations by **unmarked** member (*warmth/*coolth*)

III. Only the **unmarked** member appears in measure phrases (*three feet tall/*short*)

IV. If one member consists of an affix added to the antonym, the affix form is **marked** (*happy/unhappy*)

V. Ratios can be used only with the unmarked member (*twice as old/*young*)

VI. The **unmarked** member is evaluatively positive, the **marked**, evaluatively negative (*good/bad*)

VII. The **unmarked** member denotes more of a quantity; the **marked** less (*big/little*)

VIII. If there are asymmetrical entailments, the unmarked member is less likely to be 'biased' or 'committed' (*X is better than Y*: X may be good or bad. *X is worse than Y*: X must be bad (not good)

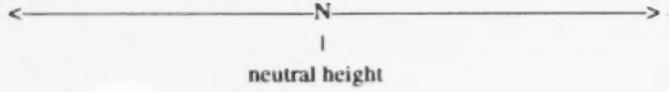
The problem with these efforts to categorize markedness criteria is not the interest in the asymmetry in pairs of linguistic items, but rather the trend toward treating the descriptive terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' as having explanatory value. Although we speak of words or phonemes or features as being marked or unmarked, and although the evidence for markedness is to be found in linguistic data, there is no reason to believe that the asymmetries noted in markedness theory represent linguistic phenomena, since our utterances and meanings are not only limited by the grammar, but also by their communicative purposes. That is, since when we use language we make reference to things in the world, qualities of those things (and our understandings of them) affect how we use language to refer to them. For instance, it is no accident of form that *water* is not a count noun—the lexico-grammatical treatment of *water* in English reflects speakers' understanding of the substance.

'Marked' and 'unmarked' merely label the symptoms of semantic asymmetry—not the causes. While labeling symptoms may be a convenient means for abbreviating the causes behind the symptoms, if we don't know what those causes are (and so far, we don't), the terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' have no theoretical import. In the case of phonological or phonetic markedness, marked/unmarked patterns may be, to a certain degree, arbitrary, and Trubetzkoy has claimed that they are language-specific. (Although the move in generative phonology has been toward universal statements of markedness.) But any non-arbitrary markedness relations require explanation. In phonology, for instance, non-arbitrary markedness may have physical explanations, based on ease of pronunciation or differentiation. In the lexicon, it is difficult to argue that any of the marked/unmarked pairings are arbitrary.

Gradable adjective distribution provides a good test for the claim that so-called marked/unmarked pairs have predictable distribution, based on semantic and pragmatic facts about the adjectives and the way that they are used in context. This test is particularly fitting, since many

linguists working on gradable adjective meaning have let markedness into their theory either as a lexical feature (+/- (UN)MARKED) or as a semantic primitive that distinguishes two members of a pair. Such treatments fail to identify any explanation for the dichotomous division and asymmetrical distribution of such terms. Instead, the most common reason for the use of markedness in such theories seems to be that the theorist has been unable or uninterested in finding asymmetries in the meanings or possible uses of antonymic adjectives that would account for differences in distribution. For example, Rusiecki (1985) gives a picture of the meanings of *tall* and *short* in a scalar model, for which *tall* and *short* are identical sides of a scale, as in (9), which satisfactorily accounts for the uses of *tall* and *short* in (10). However, this does not account for why *tall*, but not *short* can occur in measure phrases like *6 feet tall* or impartial *how* questions. In order to account for the facts in (12), Rusiecki posits that *tall* represents another scale (11) in just those cases where it occurs in a *how* question or measure statement, and that *short* is associated with no such unidirectional scale.

(9) short tall



(10) a. The University Inn is **tall**.
b. Jiminy Cricket is **short**.
c. Jiminy Cricket is **short**, but he's **tall** for an insect.
d. The University Inn isn't really **tall**, but it's **tall** for Champaign.

(11) 0——————————————>tall

(12) a. Jiminy Cricket is two inches **tall/# short**.
b. How **tall/# short** is the Urbana skyline?

How, then, does the language user know for which adjectives to posit the additional, asymmetrical scale of the type in (11)? According to Rusiecki's treatment, only unmarked terms have such scales, but markedness is treated as a given — a feature of the lexical item. However, this treatment is not sufficient, since it does not even hint at an explanation for the variety of distributions of adjectives.

Theories that rely on markedness as a theoretical primitive run into four problems. First of all, individual lexical items cannot be said to be 'marked' or 'unmarked'. Rather, they are marked or unmarked with reference to another item. If markedness is treated as a lexical feature, there is no principled limit to the number of markedness features an item would have, for it would have to have one for every other item it contrasts with. For cases like *tall*, this does not seem to be a problem, since we normally think of *tall* as contrasting only with *short*. *Short*, on the other hand, would need at least two lexical features concerning markedness: marked-with-respect-to-*tall* and marked-with-respect-to-*long*. Still other gradable adjectives have context-dependent opposites. So, for instance, it might be necessary for *dry* to have markedness

features for its relations to *wet*, *sweet* (as in *dry/sweet wine*), *moist* (as in *dry/moist cake*), and so forth. This problem also exists for nouns. *Cow* contrasts with a number of other items (*bull*, *calf*, *horse*) and has 'unmarked' distribution with respect to some of them. Even if a term is unmarked with respect to each and every term it contrasts with, it still must have as many lexical features for that unmarkedness as the number of terms it contrasts with. Because markedness is formulated as a relation among two lexical items, the theory fails to acknowledge or utilize any generalizations that can be made about, for instance, the fact that *short* is in marked distribution with respect to both *tall* and *long*.

The second problem in using markedness as a theoretical tool is that semantic markedness relations seem quite universal, with only minor variations. For instance, we never find that *short* is unmarked with respect to *tall*, even among short people. Were we to find a cave-dwelling culture where shortness was more valuable than tallness, it would still be surprising if they measured items using their term for *short* rather than *tall*. However, since markedness is a relation between lexical items, generalizations cannot be made across languages, since different languages have different lexical items.

Third, treating 'marked' and 'unmarked' specifications as means for differentiating types of distributional patterns ignores the variety of different distributional patterns found within those items labeled marked/unmarked. It is not enough to claim that items are labeled in the lexicon as +/-MARKED, as this will not differentiate items in terms of the types of marked/unmarked symptoms that they display. For example, it is not sufficient to label both *short* and *bad* 'marked' and claim that this explains their distributional patterns *vis-à-vis tall* and *good*, for all of these terms have different distributional patterns, as shown in (13). If, however, we take the stance that the meanings of these items determine their possible distributions, then it is not surprising that they distribute differently, since their meanings fall into very different semantic realms.

(13) a. How bad is it? (committed) *vs.* *How shórt is it?
vs. How good is it? (impartial?) *vs.* How tall is it? (impartial)
b. # You're 3 points good. *vs.* You're 5 feet tall.
vs. # You're 3 points bad. *vs.* # You're 5 feet short.

Finally, the focus on the distinction between marked and unmarked ignores the fact that not all antonymic pairs have asymmetrical distribution. For example, while *warm* is unmarked with respect to *cool* because it can be nominalized (as *warmth*), there is no such asymmetry among *hot* and *cold*, for which we have nominalizations *heat* and *cold* as well as symmetrical distribution in *how* questions, measure phrases, etc. Simply marking some items in the lexicon as 'marked' or 'unmarked' begs the question of **why** some pairs are asymmetrical in distribution.

As an alternative to markedness theory, a theory of gradable adjectives (or any other asymmetrically distributed category) should look for semantic and pragmatic reasons for specific distributional patterns. The questions we should ask are: What are the meanings of adjectives that can appear in syntactic/semantic context X (e.g., measure phrases, impartial *how* questions), and how do those meanings correlate with the adjectives' ability to occur in that context? What facts about the meanings of the adjectives that cannot occur in context X

explain their failure to occur in such constructions? What facts about human interaction with the world (perceptual capabilities, social/cultural rules, beliefs) limit the distributions of adjectives?

Van Langendonck (1984) follows Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in asserting that markedness properties can be derived from properties that humans display. He proposes a hierarchy of these human properties , as given in (14).

(14) **Hierarchy of human properties affecting asymmetrical distribution**

a. biological (e.g., *tall* has unmarked properties because people get taller, not shorter)
b. perceptual (e.g., *positive* is unmarked with respect to *negative* because positive = existent, and existent things are more perceptually salient than non-existent things)
c. cultural
(van Langendonck 1984)

Van Langendonck's hierarchy is open to a lot of individual variance, since he focuses on any and all properties of the speaker. It is, however, possible to give a more constrained hierarchy. In such a treatment, the distributional characteristics of adjectives can be explained by appealing to what language users know about the world, that is, what they know about what they're talking about. Such knowledge is of two types, physical and cultural, and the relevance of this knowledge is hierarchically arranged, such that physical facts have much stronger effects on distributions of adjectives than do cultural facts.

(15) **Hierarchy of Language User's Knowledge of World** (according to strength of effect on grammaticality judgments)

a. physical facts (as filtered through human perceptual mechanisms)
b. cultural knowledge

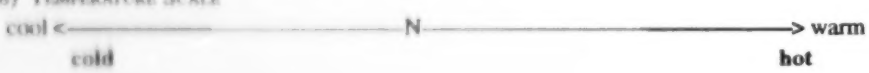
The remainder of this paper gives some examples of how knowledge of the world affects the distribution of gradable adjectives in the sorts of contexts considered so far. But first, some basics about gradable adjective meanings are in order. Gradable adjectives are those that represent qualities that can obtain, for any particular referent, at a variety of degrees. Such adjectives can be modified by degree markers like *very*, *hardly*, and *extremely*, and can be used in equative, comparative, or superlative constructions. So, the gradable adjectives in (16) contrast with the non-gradables in (17).

(16) a. The Sears Tower is **especially tall,** it is **taller** than the CN Tower.
b. It's **a little hot** in here, at least **hotter** than I like it to be.
c. The play was **really bad**; **worse**, in fact, than the novel.

(17) a. # Three is an **especially odd** number, **much odder** than two.
b. # The phone is **a little dead**, but not **as dead as** it'll be tomorrow.

Murphy (1993) sketches a theory of gradable adjective meaning in which gradable adjectives represent an inherent **comparison** between the degree to which the referent is claimed to have the quality described and some standard degree of comparison, either a neutral (or unremarkable) degree or a degree of zero. Objects are compared with the standard degree of comparison within a particular **dimension**, for example, HEIGHT, AGE, TEMPERATURE, or CLEANLINESS. The ordered range of possible degrees within a dimension is called the **scale** for that dimension. Antonymic gradable adjectives indicate different **directions** on a scale within the same dimension. So, for example, *cool* indicates the direction of the temperature scale which runs from higher to lower degrees of temperature, while *warm* indicates the opposite direction. Some adjectives, like *hot* and *cold* indicate directions within **subscales** of the dimension. These subscales are indicated in the scale in (18) by the bold area. So, when I say that something is *warm*, I claim that it is warmer than some neutral temperature. That neutral temperature is, of course, subject to contextual interpretation. So, if I say *my toes are warm*, then I may be claiming that my toes are warmer than I expected them to be, or warmer than my shoes, or warmer than some other contextually salient standard.

(18) TEMPERATURE SCALE



The claims made here about gradable adjective meaning are summarized in (19), the most important aspect of which (for the present discussion) is item (c), that different types of constructions indicate different comparison relations. This predicts that if a certain type of comparison is impossible, for example, if a standard of comparison cannot be identified for the dimension, then whatever linguistic constructions reflect that type of comparison will not be found in the language. Thus, asymmetrical distributions of antonymous adjectives indicate that some asymmetrical knowledge about or mental representation of the antonyms.

(19) **Claims about Gradable Adjective Meaning** (Murphy 1993)

a. Gradable adjectives are inherently comparative
b. Lexical representations differentiate gradables by:
   - their dimensions
   - their scalar directions
   (- what sub-range of the scale they indicate)
c. Different types of constructions indicate comparison with different standards.

Hence, if a type of comparison is impossible within a dimension, the associated linguistic constructions will not exist.

Some of these claims are exemplified in the treatment of *tall* and *short*. These two words represent different directions of measurement in the height dimension, but as shown above, they have very different distributions, as repeated in (20)-(21).

(20) a. The Empire State Building is **tall**.
b. The Empire State Building is 102 stories **tall**.
c. How **táll** is the building? (no implication that the building is tall)

(21) a. My house is **short**.
b. # My house is three stories **short**.
c. # How **shórt** is your house?

The (a) evaluation sentences are fine for both *tall* and *short* because such evaluation implies comparison with a neutral point, which in this case is unremarkable building height or median building height, or whatever is relevant to the context in which these sentences are uttered. A comparison between my house, H, and the neutral point, N, in scale (22) is as possible as a comparison between the Empire State Building, E, and the neutral point. Thus, (20a) and (21a) are reasonable sentences which reflect those comparisons.

(22) HEIGHT DIMENSION (WITH RESPECT TO BUILDINGS)

<short tall>
0——H——N——E——>
H = my house N = neutral point E = Empire State

But note that the scale in (22) is not symmetrical. While it can extend indefinitely in the tall direction, it ends at point zero on the other side. This affects the reasonableness of sentences (20b and c) versus (21b and c), since measure phrases and *how* questions do not involve comparison with the neutral point, but rather with the zero (or starting) point. Measuring, then, involves comparing an object's degree within the dimension to the beginning of the measurement scale, in this case the complete lack of height, zero. We cannot measure buildings negatively, since there is no salient starting point for measuring the vertical space that a building does not take up versus the vertical space that it does fill. Thus, our knowledge of measuring prevents us from using the weirder forms in (21).

But all gradable adjectives do not indicate asymmetrical scales. Compare the asymmetry of *tall* and *short* to the symmetry of *warm* and *cool* in the same sentence constructions, shown in (23)-(24).

(23) a. The soup is warm.
b. # The soup is 80° warm.
c. How warm is the soup? (implies the soup is warm)

(24) a. The cocoa is cool.
b. # The cocoa is 50° cool.
c. How cool is the cocoa? (implies the soup is cool)

The symmetry of *warm/cool* reflects the symmetry of the temperature scale, as illustrated in (25).

(25) TEMPERATURE SCALE (WITH RESPECT TO HEATED DRINKABLE LIQUIDS)

cool <——————C——————N——————S——————> warm

C = cocoa N = neutral S = soup

Neither term can be used in a measure phrase because there is no starting point in the temperature scale. There may be zeroes in the Fahrenheit and Celsius systems, but these zeroes are not at the beginning of the scale, so they don't count as starting points for measurement. Although absolute zero is a possible candidate for a starting point, it is not salient, for none of us has ever felt absolute zero. Thus, our knowledge about measurement and the limits of our perception predict that we cannot use measure phrases with temperature terms. The *how* questions formed with these terms entail an expectation that the soup is warm or the cocoa is cool, in contrast to the *how* question for *tall* which is neutral with respect to evaluations of the height of the building. This follows from the fact that there is no starting point on the temperature scale. Since there is no starting point, the only other option for comparison is the neutral point. So, the question (23c) can be paraphrased as 'How much warmer than the neutral temperature is the soup?' Since the soup is being compared to the neutral point using the term *warm*, which indicates the direction toward higher temperatures, the speaker has taken a side on the soup-temperature issue: It is assumed to be warm.

Note that while we can compare warm and cool things to the neutral point in *how* questions, we cannot do this for short things. It is not the case that the *short how* question entails shortness, it is just not a good sentence if it carries the usual sentential stress on the adjective. There seems to be some principle which prevents committed *how* questions on scales with starting points, whether or not the adjective in question can be used in comparisons involving the starting point. This fact has been noticed as well by Bierwisch (1989), and I have yet to find a language in which this generalization does not hold.

Dimensional adjectives such as *tall*, *short*, *warm*, and *cool*, seem to be easily accounted for with reference to knowledge that we as language users have about the qualities they denote. All of the sorts of distributional asymmetries cannot be addressed in the space of this paper, but tougher cases are to be found in terms such as *good* and *bad* and *clean* and *dirty*, in (26) and (27).

(26) a. How good is it? (impartial)
b. How bad is it? (implies badness)

(27) a. How clean is it? (impartial)
b. How dirty is it? (implies dirtiness)

The scales themselves do not necessarily show any asymmetries, since there is no salient absolute bad or absolute state of filth. This is good for the analysis, since if there were a starting point on the scale, the (b) sentences would be prevented, just as *How short are you?* is prevented. But, still there is an asymmetry to be accounted for here, and so I'll take a very preliminary stab at it. *Good* and *clean* represent qualities that are evaluatively positive to the extent that there are almost no actual contexts where goodness and cleanness are not desired states. Compare these, for instance, to other adjectives whose desirability varies among con-

texts. For example, *hard* and *soft* do not show these asymmetries, as in (28), and neither is clearly a positive quality. Whether you like pillows, butter, or wood to be hard or soft depends completely upon your individual tastes and the purposes to which you wish to put these objects. The *how* questions that result betray a presupposition about the referent's qualities.

(28) a. How soft is the mattress? (committed)
b. How hard is the mattress? (committed)

A proposal with possible merit is that our conceptions of *good* and *clean* as positive qualities and *bad* and *dirty* as negative ones are strong enough that politeness dictates that the positive item be used pseudo-impartially so that we are not forced to commit to one side or the other of the merit or cleanliness scales when inquiring about these scales. So, we ask *How good is it?* even if we recognize the possibility that it is bad because asking *How bad is it?* would, in most situations, be impolite. This would be a case in which social knowledge, knowledge of how to interact with others, affects the distribution of adjectives. Note that the effects of this type of knowledge on distribution are less rigid than the effects of knowledge of the physical world. While *How tall is it?* is necessarily impartial, *How good is it?* is more ambiguous as to whether it is committed or impartial.

In conclusion, the distributional patterns frequently labeled 'marked' and 'unmarked' are too diverse to form monolithic categories and too interesting not to try to account for in some more explanatory way. This is not to say that the intentions of markedness theory are not good. Semioticians especially have looked for explanation for the marked/unmarked distinctions they posit. Andrews (1990, p. 137) states that "the purpose of markedness theory is to explain the properties of meaning that are invariant, not to justify a system based on statistical frequency." But in the shift from structuralist to generativist interest in language, requirements for explanatory adequacy have shifted, and the artifacts of markedness theory have been misappropriated. Battistella (1990, p. 6) notes that markedness has lacked serious, modern linguistic treatment because of the proliferation of reinterpretations of the terms 'marked' and 'unmarked', many of them at odds with each other and with the structuralists' original intent. Perhaps, then, we will not be able to produce a coherent discussion of asymmetrical distribution patterns until these misunderstood categories are abandoned. While the task of explaining these distributions is not a simple one, owing to the complexity and variety of distributions, it should not be an impossible one, for these distributions are far too regular within and across languages not to be predictable at some level.

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